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Indispensable Yet Unacknowledged: Türkiye and the Future of Europe's Defence Order

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Türkiye now sits at the center of Europe's practical defence capacity, even as it remains outside the EU's formal structures. Turkish platforms, technologies and operational expertise reinforce NATO posture, secure the Black Sea, strengthen counter-terrorism and migration management as well as feed directly into Europe's defence-industrial renewal. This prominence stems from Ankara's deliberate push for defence autonomy and advanced indigenous production. The policy outlook argues that Europe's escalating security pressures are making Türkiye's exclusion increasingly untenable, and that a quiet but durable EU–Turkish defence ecosystem is already reshaping the continent's security architecture.

Introduction

Türkiye has become structurally embedded in Europe's evolving defence ecosystem, even as it remains formally excluded from the European Union's core defence institutions. Across NATO force posture, Black Sea security, military mobility, counter-terrorism, migration control, and, increasingly, defence-industrial production and supply chains, Türkiye now operates as a net security producer at a moment when Europe is struggling to regenerate its own military capacity in the shadow of the Ukraine war. Turkish platforms, subsystems, and operational experience are already interwoven into European capability development in practice, even as Ankara remains institutionally confined to the status of a peripheral 'third country' within the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, the European Defence Fund and the emerging SAFE framework.

This widening gap between functional centrality and political exclusion cannot be explained by alliance logic or material capability alone. It reflects the persistence of identity-based securitisation embedded within European defence governance. This paper examines how identity-tainted frames have shaped Türkiye's marginalisation within Europe's fragmented defence order, how Ankara has responded through a strategy of peripheral autonomy and defence-industrial localisation, and how a de facto EU-Turkish defence complex has emerged beneath the surface of formal politics. It argues that as Europe's defence imperatives intensify, the contradiction between institutional exclusion and operational dependence is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, pointing toward a gradual but ultimately unavoidable recalibration of Europe's security architecture.

European Identity, Fragmented Security and the Evolution of Türkiye–EU Relations

The European Union's (EU) security order appears to be undergoing a form of structural realignment. Now, what seems to be the illusion of post-Cold War longstanding stability and internal consistency seems to have collapsed with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The invasion clearly exposed how dependent the continent has become on American strategic cover and Russian energy. Doubts about Washington's long-term commitment appear to have fractured what once seemed a coherent Transatlantic alliance, prompting many on both sides of the pond to argue for a stronger Europe in defence. Recently, European capitals have been shaken by a Pentagon demand that Europe assume most of NATO's conventional defence by 2027, and that failure to meet this target could trigger a partial American pullback from NATO coordination, intensifying pressure on Europe's defence architecture.

NATO remains the EU's hard-security core, responsible for deterrence and collective defence. The EU has tried to develop its own security identity through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the European Defence Fund (EDF), and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Around it operate EU mechanisms, including the above-mentioned CSDP, the EDF, and PESCO, which pursue capability development, joint procurement, and research funding. Beyond these lie regional clusters such as the Weimar Triangle (France, Germany, Poland) and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) led by the United Kingdom. Each layer reflects differing memberships, resources and threat perceptions, producing what scholars call "institutional polycentrism". Fragmentation may offer flexibility, but significantly undermines coherence and appears disorganised. Most relevantly, and in direct response to growing American pressure for greater European burden-sharing, the EU launched the Readiness 2030 (also known as ReArm Europe) framework in March 2025. The initiative aimed to mobilise billions of euros to expand Europe's defence-industrial base, accelerate joint procurement as well as scale up production of critical capabilities including air defence, unmanned systems, cyber defence, ammunition and military mobility infrastructure via the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) mechanism, a centralised EU financing and joint-procurement tool designed to rapidly expand industrial output and replenish stockpiles.

In this environment, Türkiye operates as both an insider and an outsider: a NATO ally with extensive interoperability and a defence industry deeply linked to Europe, yet formally excluded from EU decision-making. This paradoxical positioning is visible in multiple domains historically:

- Türkiye's early post-Cold War engagement in Bosnia and Kosovo positioned it as a stabiliser rather than a spoiler. It deployed forces under KFOR, supported post-conflict reconstruction through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), and later co-chaired the South-Eastern Europe Defence Ministerial (SEDM). Türkiye's contributions to EUFOR Althea (the EU's military mission for the stabilisation and integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM) underscore its alignment with European peace operations norms.
- During the Arab Spring, Türkiye pursued an activist diplomacy emphasising mediation and humanitarian aid. It coordinated refugee relief in Syria and Iraq, engaged diplomatically in Libya and promoted dialogue in Yemen. Although some EU capitals criticised these moves as unilateral, they often

complemented EU objectives, including stability, counter-terrorism and security of energy supply.

- The 2013 Readmission Agreement and the 2016 EU-Türkiye Statement represented the most concrete form of functional integration between Ankara and Brussels. By 2019, irregular arrivals to Europe via the Eastern Mediterranean route had dropped to approximately 123,000, an 80 percent decrease from 2015 levels. In 2023 alone, Türkiye intercepted over 250,000 irregular crossings, directly reducing pressure on Greece and Bulgaria (İldem, 2025). Türkiye continues to host over 3.5 million Syrian refugees, effectively absorbing humanitarian and political costs that would otherwise destabilise the EU's southern flank. Yet instead of institutionalising this cooperation, the EU framed it as transactional, reinforcing dependency narratives.
- Geography has always made Türkiye indispensable to European security. It bridges the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East; controls the Bosporus and Dardanelles; and borders Russia's southern flank and NATO's southeastern frontier. Chokepoints, corridors and buffer zones all define continental power projection. Türkiye's geography positions it as the hinge of Europe's extended security perimeter. Control of the Straits gives Ankara leverage over naval access between the Mediterranean and Black Sea. Significantly, enforcement of the Montreux Convention restricted belligerent naval transit, preventing escalation into NATO-Russia confrontation. No EU member state possesses comparable influence in the Black Sea basin, yet this role remains under-acknowledged in Brussels' strategic assessments.
- Türkiye's mediation between Russia and Ukraine, hosting the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, and facilitating the Black Sea Grain Initiative exemplify its diplomatic leverage but are again under-acknowledged.
- Energy infrastructure further exemplifies this positioning. The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum (BTE) pipelines established the Caspian–Mediterranean corridor. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and TurkStream expanded capacity to more than 97 billion m^3 per year by 2023, connecting the EU directly to Azerbaijani and Russian gas while bypassing volatile transit routes. Türkiye's gas hub strategy is gaining traction as it positions itself as a key LNG and pipeline gateway for Europe's reshaped energy system, having discovered significant Black Sea gas reserves. This illustrates Türkiye's centrality to Europe's decarbonisation and energy diversification strategies under REPowerEU, which aim to diversify energy supplies away from Russian pipelines to meet the EU's energy needs. However, the EU has moved to stop gas flows into the EU via Turkstream, prompting public resistance from EU member states like Hungary and Serbia, evidencing the "pipeline's geopolitical weight". The EU is still clearly reluctant to acknowledge the reality of its energy security needs.

Collectively, these contributions reveal Türkiye's transformation into a net security exporter, whether it's through deterrence, energy, migration control or crisis mediation. Empirical alignment with European strategic interests is clear, but institutional recognition lags behind. EU strategic documents, from the 2003 European Security Strategy to the 2022 Strategic Compass, continue to portray Türkiye ambivalently: a "strategic partner" in rhetoric, a "potential disruptor" in practice.

These actions demonstrate "normative convergence without institutional inclusion", with Ankara internalising many European security norms while denying formal participation. It can be explained by "layered interdependence," given the dense transactional linkages between the EU and Türkiye, without shared decision-making. Türkiye's alignment with Europe on several matters, as pointed out above, exemplifies this structure. Without political recognition, however, layered interdependence produces fragility, as cooperation depends mostly on goodwill rather than institutional obligation. The future stability of Europe's periphery hinges on converting this functional dependence into structured partnership mechanisms that acknowledge Türkiye's geographic centrality.

This discrepancy also reflects identity inertia rather than empirical assessment. Türkiye's behaviour increasingly reflected a "security-producing" profile rather than a "security-consuming" one associated with border instability, migration pressure, and geographical proximity to conflict. This framing is clearly not based in reality and has instead been socially constructed through narratives that linked geography and identity to perceived risk. As per constructivist theory, identity shapes threat perception and, consequently, security policy. Based on this, Türkiye was often portrayed as a civilisational "other" in EU discourse, whether it was being Muslim, semi-peripheral or politically volatile. Such identity coding persisted even as Türkiye aligned with Western norms through NATO, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations (UN) operations.

An explanation can be found in the Copenhagen School's concept of securitisation, in which political elites label certain actors as threats to justify extraordinary measures: from the mid-1990s onwards, Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration repeatedly securitised Türkiye's actions in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, institutionalising Ankara's marginalisation within EU foreign-policy processes. After 1999, Türkiye's EU candidacy briefly softened this discourse. The early 2000s saw harmonisation packages, human rights reforms, and

economic liberalisation that converged with the EU's Copenhagen Criteria. Yet the narrative reversal following the 2004 Cyprus accession transformed conditional engagement into permanent exceptionalism: Türkiye was rhetorically European but institutionally excluded. It was argued that this shift revealed exactly how identity-based securitisation triumphed over interest-based cooperation.

The conceptual lenses traditionally used to interpret Türkiye–EU relations, including realism and liberal institutionalism, cannot fully account for the enduring asymmetry between material contribution and institutional exclusion. Realism views states as power-maximising actors in an anarchic system, where security stems from military capability and alliance management. By this logic, Türkiye, as NATO's southeastern bulwark, and NATO's, as well as Europe's, second-largest army, along with being NATO's third largest contributor, should command substantial influence. Liberalism, on the other hand, emphasises interdependence and rule-based cooperation: Türkiye's customs union with the EU, deep trade integration, and long-standing NATO coordination should have generated mutual trust and institutional convergence by now.

With that said, neither framework explains exactly why, despite overlapping interests and interdependence, Türkiye remains politically peripheral. Constructivism attempts to fill this gap by asserting that identities construct interests and that threat perceptions are socially produced. Within this paradigm, European security governance is shaped less by material variables than by how European elites define the boundaries of "Europeanness," i.e., being Christian, post-national, and liberal, against an external "Islamic periphery." Despite its secular governance, Türkiye appears to occupy this liminal space in the European mind. Europe's perception of Türkiye has clearly not evolved in line with empirical reality because identity frames, once institutionalised, deeply resist change.

Türkiye's Peripheral Autonomy

Türkiye's drive for indigenous defence production is rooted in the trauma of external dependency experienced during the Cold War. The 1964 Johnson Letter, in which the US, a NATO partner, explicitly warned Ankara against using American-supplied weapons in Cyprus, marked a turning point by exposing the political conditionality embedded in alliance-based armaments. This vulnerability was fully institutionalised with the American arms embargo imposed after Türkiye's 1974 Cyprus intervention, which crippled military readiness but also directly spurred the rapid development of the country's modern defence-industrial base.

This logic of strategic autonomy was later formalised after 2002, when Ankara adopted a state-wide mandate prioritising indigenous defence production, technology transfer and export-oriented growth. During the early 2000s, the Turkish government also viewed EU accession as both a modernisation project and a foreign-policy anchor. Comprehensive reforms in governance, human rights, and the economy aligned Türkiye with EU norms, while the country's participation in the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) missions showcased operational compatibility. However, the 2004 Cyprus veto and the subsequent freeze on negotiation chapters transformed the accession process from a path to integration into an instrument of leverage, again based on conditionality and, essentially, compliance from the Turkish side.

After 2010, the focus on national defence-industrial independence and proactive regional diplomacy accelerated significantly. Türkiye's defence exports have expanded at a striking pace, climbing from 2.3 billion USD in 2020 to over 7.1 billion USD in 2024, placing Türkiye as the world's 11th largest arms exporter, with its share of global exports more than doubling from 0.8 percent in 2015–2019 to 1.7 percent in 2020–2024. This surge reflected a structural shift driven by scaled mass production and indigenous innovation, anchored in cost-effective, combat-proven systems such as the Bayraktar TB2, which demonstrated operational credibility in Karabakh and Ukraine. Flagship firms such as Baykar, ASELSAN, ROKETSAN, and TUSAŞ exemplify this transformation. Türkiye is now considered a global leader in the production of unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs), precision-guided munitions, naval platforms, and fifth-generation trainer aircraft. Such capabilities not only enhance deterrence but also strengthen bargaining power within Transatlantic security frameworks. This peripheral autonomy also manifests in Türkiye's multilateral humanitarian diplomacy. Through TİKA and the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), Ankara projects soft power from the Balkans to Central Asia.

However, acknowledging these achievements would be an admission that Türkiye is a security producer rather than a security consumer, and that would directly challenge the narrative that enables Türkiye's exclusion from relevant EU security decision-making mechanisms and institutions. The historical trajectory of the Turkish defence industry may also explain why contemporary EU mechanisms such as SAFE and the EDF, which structurally privilege EU-only industrial participation, are viewed in Ankara not merely as commercial constraints but as an echo of strategic vulnerabilities that originally gave rise to Türkiye's autonomy doctrine. The same sovereignty principle now extends beyond defence into energy security: Türkiye's Black Sea gas development has been executed almost entirely by Türkiye itself through state-owned Türkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı (TPAO), with foreign firms limited to technical service roles rather than strategic equity participation.

Europe's Defence Fragmentation and the Emergent Euro-Turkish Defence Complex

Europe's defence industry remains highly fragmented at both national and industry levels. Despite the presence of integration frameworks like the EDF and PESCO, issues persist in the area of essential capabilities, ranging from replicating main battle tanks and next-generation fighters to differing procurement policies. Consequently, the European ambition for strategic autonomy continues to depend less on defined institutional integration and more on industry interoperability. It is within this arena that Türkiye appears as a structurally important player.

Over the last 10 years, the Turkish defence industry has shifted from reliance on imports to localisation and export competitiveness. Defence exports have almost reached 8 billion USD in 2025 and now span more than 185 overseas markets. Lead companies Baykar, ASELSAN, ROKETSAN and TUSAŞ are not merely marginal actors but are instead melded into the European aerospace, missiles and naval sectors via co-production and subsystem supply chains. Such industry networks, especially those with Italian, Spanish, German, Polish, and Romanian partners, not only indicate the advancing technological sophistication of Türkiye but also the increasingly observable intensity of their functional interdependence, spurred by shared necessities for security and efficiency.

This constantly unfolding structure of cooperation embodies what can only be termed the Euro-Turkish Defence Complex: the transnational milieu of joint and coordinated research and development efforts, co-production, and supply chain integration, operating for the most part beyond the remits of strictly political symbolism. This dynamic mirrors neatly the logic of spillovers, whereby the existence of a high degree of technocratic activity within a particular sector of interaction gives rise to an internally driven necessity for deeper political integration. As regards the relationship between the EU and Türkiye, the defence industry offers the best available channel for restoring political trust. Türkiye brings its cost-effective manufacturing base, flexible engineering, and experience in operationally testing developed systems, already integrated into several active combat theatres. The European member states, on the other hand, offer certification mechanisms and mature export policies and instruments. There are undoubtedly mutual benefits: European industry benefits from greater competitiveness and faster delivery times, while Türkiye gains access to high-quality components and regulatory frameworks.

From a systems perspective, integration with Türkiye enhances Europe's resilience. Türkiye's production of drones, armoured vehicles and missile systems fills capability gaps created by underinvestment in multiple EU states for many years. Its geographic location enables logistics flexibility for NATO and EU operations across the Mediterranean and Black Sea theatres. Conversely, Europe offers Türkiye technology infusion and market access. The synergy embodies the logic of functional interdependence: neither side can achieve full strategic autonomy without the other. As functional cooperation deepens, it is likely to force Brussels to eventually reconcile discursive exclusion with industrial necessity.

It can be said that Türkiye is careful not to signal a strategic rupture with the EU despite the exclusion, and instead diversifies by cultivating alternative partnerships outside the EU as a pragmatic adaptation to Europe's structural ambivalence and reflexive inertia in responding to a changing global order. Türkiye's economic integration with Europe remains profound: Under the EU–Türkiye Customs Union, bilateral trade reached a record of more than 210 billion EUR in 2024, with 41 percent of Türkiye's exports going to the EU, and the EU exports 32 percent of its exports to Türkiye. Politically, however, the relationship operates in a liminal zone, neither inside nor outside, reflecting a "post-accession grey zone." As a consequence of nurturing peripheral autonomy, Türkiye has engineered freedom to innovate technologically and pursue multi-vector diplomacy, while on the other hand, it has entrenched the EU in depending on a longtime partner that it cannot formally govern, a dynamic that will only continue to add to Europe's strategic weakness and security incoherence.

Constraints, Contradictions and Identity Barriers

However, the current level of cooperation is limited by several existing challenges that hinder growth. Among these are the European export control schemes, specifically the tighter rules introduced since the advent of the Syrian sanctions regime in 2019, which remain inhibitive of the movement of higher-value subsystems between member states (European Council, 2019; Kemp, 2020; Bendiek & Kempin, 2022). Different certification and standards systems also inhibit a smooth process of joint research and development efforts (European Commission, 2020).

It is also important to note that Türkiye's persistent marginalisation stems from deeper issues in identity politics within European integration. The European narrative of what they consider to be shared values often doubles as a gatekeeping device. The invocation of European values implicitly marks Islamic identity as external, even when the actor in question, Türkiye, has been a NATO ally for over 70 years. Research consistently

shows majorities in several EU member states mostly opposing Türkiye's accession on identity-based cultural or religious grounds. These perceptions translate into political pressure that perhaps limits elite flexibility.

Furthermore, when Türkiye asserts autonomous policy in the Middle East or Eastern Mediterranean, it is, unfairly, read not as normal middle-power behaviour but as a deviation from European norms. Narratives of democratic backsliding and human rights concerns tend to be applied selectively, for apparent convenience, as comparable governance issues in several EU member states rarely lead to the suspension of defence cooperation. However, in Türkiye's case, such critiques serve as moral justification for withholding institutional access. The result is standards applied politically rather than consistently.

These identity barriers produce contradictions and erode trust. On one hand, European policymakers praise Türkiye's indispensability in energy, migration and counter-terrorism; on the other, they describe it as unreliable or revisionist. This duality reflects a deeper tension between Europe's normative self-image and the geopolitical realities of its neighbourhood. Even within the EU, these inconsistencies and fissures are evident: Greece and Cyprus both threatened to veto Türkiye's participation in the above-mentioned SAFE defence financing mechanism as part of the ReArm Europe initiative, despite strong German support and lobbying. Another example, as pointed out by the Turkish Ambassador to NATO recently, is excluding Türkiye from PESCO Military Mobility, meaning Turkish forces cannot legally transit EU territory even if reinforcements were required, even at a time of threatened US withdrawal and unresolved war in Ukraine. Both these examples only reflect incoherent rather than rational defence planning. If things remain the same, the EU and Türkiye will remain in a "functional integration without legitimacy" pattern, benefiting neither to the extent that a bona fide, recognised partnership can.

Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

The preceding analysis yields actionable recommendations for both Ankara and Brussels. As identity changes can emerge through new interaction patterns and shared practices, Türkiye's growing technological partnerships may become the sociological bridge that political diplomacy has failed to build. If the basic underlying problem appears to be identity politics, it is only logical to design policy and programmatic recommendations around that:

1. Institutional and Diplomatic Architecture

- **Decouple security cooperation from accession politics.** Use an explicit "security-first" framework between the EU and Türkiye: a structured high-level dialogue on defence, industrial cooperation and regional theatres (Black Sea, Syria, Ukraine, East Med), formally separated from the frozen accession track. Think tanks are already arguing for treating Türkiye as a de facto security partner rather than a candidate in limbo.
- **Create a dedicated third-country defence partnership status.** SAFE, EDF, PESCO, etc already have ad hoc rules for non-EU third states, but they are opaque and politicised. The EU should codify a predictable "associate security partner" category with clear rules, conditionality on CFSP alignment, and automatic technical eligibility for funding once conditions are met. As of now, Turkish (and all non-EU) firms are simply barred from co-producing EU defence projects with SAFE financing because no such agreement exists, and all previous loopholes have been closed.
- **With that said, promote unity and interdependence, not further fragmentation.** Since some EU states (most likely Greece and Cyprus, as noted above) seem uncomfortable with what they perceive as an overreliance on Türkiye in defence, there is an ongoing discussion about an autonomous "alliance within an alliance" defence model within the EU minus these states. While intended to strengthen European defence, such a framework risks excluding key non-EU NATO partners, such as Türkiye, thereby weakening both European and transatlantic security. Rather than further fragmenting the security architecture, the EU should pursue inclusive defence arrangements that leverage Türkiye's military, industrial, and geographic assets to support Europe's strategic resilience and credibility.
- **Ring-fence bilateral disputes from multilateral schemes.** As noted above, Greece and Cyprus threatened to use their veto power over Turkish participation in SAFE. This may be a hard-to-implement recommendation, but the goal is not to ignore any valid concerns; rather, it is to formalise a rule that disputes must be handled in parallel tracks, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), rather than through members exercising veto power. This is important to prevent paralysis of pan-European defence.

2. Industrial and Programmatic Cooperation

- **Scale what is working: joint ventures and co-production.** The Baykar–Leonardo 50–50 Joint Venture (JV), known as LBA Systems, has been set up to develop and produce unmanned systems in Italy, and is the clearest example of something that has worked in terms of defence cooperation between the two parties: it anchors Turkish tech into an EU-based supply chain, uses EU content and is framed as European capability. This JV can serve as a model for 2–3 more flagship programmes (e.g., naval systems, electronic warfare, or border surveillance) involving at least one major EU and one major Turkish firm. These must be designed from day one to meet SAFE/EDF content thresholds, so they are legally fundable.
- **Further integrate defence research and development.** Build consortia linking the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) with European research agencies to advance next-generation propulsion, electronics, and autonomy. This can also include developing shared metrics. Monitor cooperation through measurable indicators such as the number of joint projects, trade volumes in defence goods, reductions in irregular migration, or cross-border energy flows. Share these on relevant platforms to reach wider audiences.

3. Discursive Realignment and Political Narrative

- **Reframe inclusion as European self-interest, not a concession.** Turkish participation should be framed as a force multiplier for Europe's defence-industrial base. Official messaging should emphasise concrete advantages in drones, naval systems and radar, presenting EU–Türkiye cooperation as making Europe stronger, cheaper, and faster.
- **Shift from civilisational to functional language.** EU officials and national media should prioritise interdependence in defence, energy, migration and technology over identity-based framing.
- **Build elite epistemic communities.** Institutionalise joint policy and research networks linking EU and Turkish think tanks to normalise strategic cooperation through shared analytical frameworks.
- **Use targeted public diplomacy.** Promote shared historical contributions to European security through joint exhibitions, documentaries and educational programmes, from the Crimean War to NATO operations.

4. Strategic Integration Mechanisms

- **Embed trust-building into programmes, not rhetoric.** Pair industrial projects with structured officer exchanges, joint exercises, and shared situational-awareness platforms under NATO-compatible formats. Take advantage of symbolic trust building measures: an example from November 2025, when the EU appointed a military advisor to its delegation in Ankara for the first time, reflects an acknowledgment by Brussels about the need for a more structured defence dialogue with Türkiye amidst growing pressure from within the EU to explore deeper cooperation in critical capability areas such as drone technology and defence industrial production. Ankara will also appoint its own defence advisor to the Turkish mission in Brussels, indicating a mutual willingness to formalise communication channels.
- **Institutionalise** Türkiye's mediator role. Include Ankara in EU crisis-response planning for the Black Sea, MENA and the Caucasus.
- **Deepen defence R&D integration with measurable outputs.** Build structured consortia between the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) and European research agencies focused on propulsion, electronics, and autonomous systems, and track cooperation via shared metrics.

Conclusion

For more than three decades, Türkiye's marginalisation within Europe's defence institutions has been sustained less by operational logic than by identity-based securitisation embedded in what is considered European culture. However, the material foundations of European security are now shifting at a pace that this discursive architecture cannot comfortably absorb. Europe's accelerated rearmament, the revival of defence-industrial planning under SAFE and ReArm Europe, the militarisation of the Black Sea, as well as the securitisation of energy corridors, migration routes and supply routes are binding European security ever more tightly to Türkiye's geography, production capacity and operational access. A structural dissonance seems to have emerged: Türkiye is indispensable in practice but absent in governance. This dissonance is not merely inefficient; it is strategically corrosive. As defence-industrial integration, crisis coordination and regional stabilisation efforts deepen, the gap between institutional exclusion and operational dependence will become progressively harder to sustain without systemic incoherence. The recalibration of EU-Turkish defence relations, therefore, is no longer a matter of political preference or diplomatic goodwill. It is becoming a functional requirement of Europe's own security order.